

## **CHAPTER II**

# **THE ELECTORAL PROMISES AND POPULISM OF THE SIKKIM DEMOCRATIC FRONT**

The Chapter seeks to answer the question, what are the different promises which the party has made for winning elections since 1994 and maintaining its dominant position in the politics of the State? We look into the promises of the SDF because the party has used promises as an important part of its strategy for the purpose of winning elections and remain in power. The chapter also looks at whether the promises are a part of electoral populism which the party has used in order to mobilize support. The chapter is divided into two sections. Section I discusses the promises of the SDF as a part of its electoral strategy for winning elections and maintaining its dominance in the state and Section II looks at how populism is used by the SDF as a part of its strategy to come to power and be in power. The sections are further divided into sub-sections.

### **SECTION I**

#### **Electoral Promises of the Sikkim Democratic Front**

We have seen in the first chapter that the SDF as a regional political party in Sikkim arose as a reaction against the Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP) government, which was in power in Sikkim since 1984. The SDF was formed as a sole opposition and was of the opinion that the SSP government was ruling in an

undemocratic manner. The arrest and torture of political leaders like Biraj Adhikari, Dhan Raj Tamang, Dharma Dutta Sharma and temporal closures of some of the newspapers like "The Observer" shows that freedom of speech and expression did not actually prevail in Sikkim (Kazi,1993).

SDF felt in the beginning that the people of Sikkim were in search of an alternative to the Bhandari (SSP) led government with a new leader and a new party who would lead Sikkim into a new progressive dimension. The SDF started with the slogan that it is interested in making Sikkim a "New Sikkim and Happy Sikkim". This was its initial slogan and the party was able to win people's trust and won the Assembly election of 1994 with 19 seats out of a total of 32 seats in the state.

The political parties like the Congress (I), Rising Sun, Communist party of India (CPI), Bharatiya Janata Party, and Revolutionary Socialist Party contested the election of 1994 but the main contest was between the SSP and the SDF. The Sikkim Sangram Parishad government was charged by the opposition parties namely the Congress 'I', Sikkim Democratic Front, Communist Party of India (Marxist) and by Organizations like the Citizens for Democracy, Sikkim and A Human Rights Organisation in Sikkim, that the state was being ruled in an undemocratic manner. The arrest and torture of political leaders like Biraj Adhikari, Dhan Raj Tamang on 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1993, Duknath Nepal a member of the CPI(M), Sikkim state organizing Committee on 24<sup>th</sup> October, 1992, Dharma Dutta Sharma, a local Congress (I) activist on February, 1988, Hem Lall Bhandari, practicing Sikkimese lawyer, Rajender Baid, editor of a Hindi daily- "Janpath Samachar" in November 1991 all proved that the government of the Sikkim Sangram Parishad under Nar Bahadur Bhandari used

repressive measures and curtailed democratic rights of the people (Gaunley, 2002).

The "Amnesty International" article entitled 'India' and subtitled "Sikkim", 'Torture of an opposition politician', dated October, 1994 published from London made an inquiry into how opposition leaders and politicians were tortured and humiliated by the government led by N. B. Bhandari. The article stated that the SSP rule was undemocratic and many treason, atrocities, killings torture of opposition leaders was taking place. The press went for temporary closures from time to time due to the pressure put by the government. Mal-administration and communalism was the common criticism against the ruling SSP government. As a result of all these CBI cases were initiated against the Chief Minister N. B. Bhandari regarding his house at Ranipool, New Delhi, Land at Tadong, NamNang, Mini palace at Church road, Arithang houses at Gangtok Bazar, Sangram Bhawan, Pines Printer established in 1980 at his residence and many other private companies owned by Bhandari which were registered in different people's names (Gaunley, 2002, p. 19). All these factors led to the urgency for the formation of a strong opposition political party which could change the political scenario of Sikkim. A Joint Action Committee (JAC) was formed by political parties like the Sikkim Democratic Front, Congress (I), Bharatiya Janata Party, Communist Party of India (Marxist) and organizations like Citizens for Democratic Human Rights Organization in Sikkim which opposed the ruling government under Sikkim Sangram Parishad. Faced with opposition from all sides, the Sikkim Sangram Parishad ultimately lost its long preserved position of fourteen (14) years in Sikkim.

SDF as a new regional political party aimed at restoring rights and privileges of the people and fight against the unjust

regime. The party felt that even though democracy was implanted in Sikkim since its merger with the Indian Union in 1975, many of the basic democratic rights, values and principles had been eroded. The party, therefore, wants to strengthen the democratic principles enshrined in the Constitution of India. It claimed that the Sikkim Democratic Party is interested in re-orienting the economic and social policies in the state.

To make Sikkim 'New and Happy Sikkim' the party promised certain things which can be categorized into Political Promises, Economic Promises, Social Welfare Promises and Educational Promises. In the sub-sections below we discuss this.

### **POLITICAL PROMISES**

The Political promises which the SDF made can be further divided into two sub categories. There were in fact two components of this; the promise of democracy and the promise of decentralization.

**Democracy:** The first election contested by the party was the Assembly Election\* held in December 1994. In its party manifesto the party claimed that the party's first and foremost aim was the safeguard of democracy. Adding to it, the party promised to give political, social and economic justice to the people (SDF, Election Manisfesto, 1994).

Criticizing the SSP rule, the party said that democracy was absent in Sikkim under the government of Nar Bahadur Bhandari. The Chief Minister of Sikkim was accused of corruption charges by B.B Gurung in 1984. B.B Gurung was from the Indian National Congress. In this he sought the help of the Congress government at the centre. As a result, the democratic set up was disturbed in the state. Political and economic rights of the people were denied

and the voice of all the opposition parties in the state was also suppressed by the government (Kazi, 1993, pp.173-175).

The party felt that the fourth estate of democracy, freedom of press and media were under the control of the government. Right to "Freedom of Speech" was not allowed under the ruling government (Kazi, 1993). The party thus, promised to restore the constitutional rights of the press and restore back freedom of Speech and Rule of Law as far as the views and opinions were constructive. The party unlike SSP supported more freedom of expression and opinion.

On 21<sup>st</sup> July, 1993, the Chief Minister N. B. Bhandari emphasized on imposing central income tax rule in Sikkim (Sharma, 1996). The Sikkim Democratic Front opposed the extension and enforcement of Central Direct Tax laws in Sikkim because the extension and enforcement of such laws was in violation of the merger agreement enshrined in Article 371(f).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> The provisions of article 371(f) relating to Sikkim reveal the following noteworthy features:

1. Allotment of not less than 30 members which should have been according to article 170 of the constitution of India, not less than 60 members.
2. The members of Legislative Assembly elected in 1974 to continue after the merger till 1979.
3. Maintenance of party/reserved seats for the three ethnic communities in Sikkim Legislative Assembly.
4. The Governor of Sikkim vested with special responsibility for the maintenance of peace and for equitable arrangement form ensuring social and economic advancement of different sections to the population. The Governor of Sikkim is subject to such direction as the President of India from time to time deem fit to issue.
5. Property and assets previously vested in the government of Sikkim or any authority under it within and outside Sikkim came to be vested with the Government of Sikkim.
6. While the existing laws of Sikkim will remain in force, they will subject to such modification and amendment as the president of India may deem necessary to introduce by order issued within 2 years from the date of merger. Similarly he may by public notification extend to Sikkim with necessary modifications any enactment which is in force in other states of India.
7. These provisions were made effective in Sikkim with effect from 26<sup>th</sup> April, 1975 (Lama, 1994)

The party also promised for the complete safeguard of Sikkimese rules and traditions and Rule of Law (SDF, Election manifesto, 1994, p.3). After the state's merger with the Indian Union in 1975, many people from the surrounding states like West Bengal and Nepal started entering into the state as traders and in search of employment. The party, thus, felt that it was necessary to maintain the identity of the Sikkimese people and protect its long cherished traditions and rule of Law. The party also felt that the earlier government (SSP) adopted a hostile attitude towards the Central government and other regions of the country. The party in this regard promised to promote national and emotional integration with the center (Gaunley, 2002).

The SDF promised the inclusion of Limboo and Tamang community in the Tribal list and Rai, Gurung, Manger, Bhujel, Sunwar in the OBC list (SDF, Election Manifesto, 1994, p.3.) The SDF stated that the government under Sikkim Sangram Parishad had refused to implement the recommendation of the Mandal Commission regarding the inclusion of Rai, Gurung, Manger, Bhujel and Sunwar in the OBC category in 1987. Therefore the Sikkim Democratic Front promised to grant the right of these communities of the society which was denied by the government of Nar Bahadur Bhandari.

Sikkim mainly constitutes of three ethnic groups- Bhutia, Lepcha, Nepali. The languages of these three groups are mainly spoken in Sikkim.<sup>19</sup> The party in order to protect and promote the languages of the two ethnic groups; Bhutia and Lepcha promised to forward proposals to the central government for the inclusion of

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<sup>19</sup> Nepali language received the constitutional recognition and is included in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1992.

these languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution (SDF, Election manifesto, 1998, p.6 & 1999, p.7).

Referring to article 371(f) and the 8<sup>th</sup> May Agreement, the party promised to preserve the rights of the Nepali and Tsong in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly (SDF, Election Manifesto, 1994, p.3; SDF, Election Manifesto, 1999, p.2; SDF, Election Manifesto, 2004, p.8).<sup>20</sup> The party also promised that it will safe-guard the constitutional rights of all Sikkimese tribal's and Schedule Castes in the state. The party felt it necessary to protect their rights as these sections of society are the minority groups in the state (SDF, Election Manifesto, 1994 & 1998).

Till date Sikkim has only one representative in the Indian Parliament, so to increase the number of representatives in the parliament from one to two and to have more representative of Sikkim the party in its election manifesto of 12<sup>th</sup> Lok Sabha Election, 1998 promised to make and raise the proposal in the parliament. For greater participation at the national level the party promised more integration of the state with central government (SDF, Election Manifesto, p.4, 1998; SDF, Election Manifesto, 2004, p.5).

The party pledged to include Gurung, Rai, Manger, Sunwar, Thami, Jogi, Dewan in the tribal category.<sup>21</sup> The party promised reservation of seats for the Tamang and Limboo communities in the state Legislative Assembly. And it also promised to include Chettri, Bhaun, Newar, Sanyasi in the OBC category (SDF, Election Manifesto, 2004, p.6-7).

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<sup>20</sup> The seats for Nepali and Tsong were reserved till 1979. It was removed by Bill No.79, Act No.8, 1980.

<sup>21</sup> Tamang and Limboo were included in this category in 2003.

Referring to Article 371 (f), the party promised to protect the identity of the ethnic groups in the state. The party promised to give preference and first priority to the Sikkimese people who are Sikkim subjects in the government jobs and other fields. It also promised to protect the rights and welfare of the employees in Sikkim from outside Sikkim (SDF, Election Manifesto, p.25, 1999 & SDF, Election Manifesto p.4, 2004). In its election manifesto of 1994, the party pledged to protect old laws of Sikkim and Revenue Order No.1 (SDF, Election Manifesto, 1994, p.3.)

The Old Laws of Sikkim includes:

- The registration of land belonging to Bhutia and Lepcha of Sikkim cannot be transferred to other communities of Sikkim and outside Sikkim, except the land can be given under the lease system.
- Reservation of seats in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly. The old laws include the preservation of one Sangha seat (seat reserved for monks of different monasteries in Sikkim).<sup>22</sup> It also promised twelve Bhutia- Lepcha seats belonging to the Bhutia and Lepcha Community.
- In Sikkim there are restricted areas like Dzongu in north Sikkim meaning the Land of Lepchas. No Sikkimese other than Lepchas can enter this particular area without inner line permit from the concerned authority.
- The old laws also include the restriction upon the purchase of land and property in Sikkim by a non-local in his/her name directly.

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<sup>22</sup> Sangha seat is the seat reserved for the Buddhist Lamas (monks) and nuns in which only they have the right to elect their representative in the 32 member Assembly in the state. The monks can cast their vote from their respective assembly constituencies in a separate ballot box.

- On the basis of Sikkim Domicile, the local Sikkimese people are given job opportunities in the state. Non-local people from other states who do not possess Sikkim Domicile are not entitled to sit for the interview in regular government jobs in Sikkim.

Politically the SDF promised to restore democracy in the state. To it the earlier government had failed to safeguard the democratic rights of the Sikkimese people. The SDF, thus pledged to restore democracy and protect the old laws and traditions of Sikkim. The party claimed that the identity of the ethnic groups in the state was in danger and hence it promised to protect the identity of these groups by promoting their language and script.

### **THE PROMISE OF DECENTRALISATION OF POWER**

In examining the evolution and role of Panchayati Raj institution in Sikkim, it can be said that Local Area Panchayat was introduced in 1950. This enabled the formation of village Panchayats at the local level on election basis but this failed in its functioning. The second attempt was made in 1965 by passing the Sikkim Panchayat Act, which implemented the Block Panchayat at village level. This Block Panchayat continued till 1981. The Block level Panchayats were vested with the responsibility of looking at the development of agriculture, agricultural farms, food campaign, dairy farming, minor irrigation, promote of cottage industry, welfare works like construction of public toilets, sanitation, health, women and child welfare, maintenance of school, water supply and organization of community program in the village.

Despite these long listed functions, Panchayats actually did not perform such functions. Their role was confined to placing of demands to the government and nominating the contractor for the

implementation of minor schemes. The Panchayat institution served as a facade of democracy rather than effective popular participation. Hence, it was clear that developmental role of Panchayats was more on paper than in practice.

The Panchayat Act 1982 introduced the two tier Panchayati Raj System with Gram Panchayat at the block level and Zilla Panchayat at the district level. The Panchayat Act of 1982 provides the panchayat's with the functions like sanitation, drainage, supply of drinking water, welfare etc. A study was conducted in the year 1985 on Local Self Government and Democratic Decentralization in Sikkim. In the report of the study it stated that the Panchayati Raj institution in Sikkim is still lagging behind in taking up the responsibilities of development and popular participation. The panchayat's should be involved not only in identification of problems but also in the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evolution of the state plan.

The Sikkim Democratic Front regarded Panchayati Raj Institution as the basis of democratic decentralisation and promised to take steps for strengthening these institutions and establish institutions where they don't exist and provide necessary administrative and financial resources for their functioning. To make Panchayati Raj Institutions more effective, the Panchayat elections were held on party lines and a provision of honorarium to the Panchayat members was made. Chamling also promised the appointment of Panchayat Assistants to advice the Panchayat's to conduct local survey, collect data for village plan and for overall socio-economic development of Sikkim were promised (SDF, Election Manifesto, Panchayat Election, 1997).

The Sikkim Democratic Front alleged that though Panchayati Raj Institutions prevailed in the state since 1950's, the actual

decentralisation of power was not done. It alleged that the Sikkim Sangram Parishad government had minimized the powers and functions of the Panchayat's and other local self institutions. The Sikkim Democratic Front, therefore, promised that decentralisation of powers will be done in Sikkim. It promised that in all gram Panchayat's the Panchayat's will be empowered to decide and implement plans. The Zilla Panchayat's will be enabled to debate on the district plans and programme's the works of villages to be done by the villagers themselves. For this, the party further stated that, the public works of Rs. 5 lakhs will be given to the Panchayat's and it will be raised to Rs. 10 lakh on recommendation of Gram Sabha (Election Manifesto, Panchayat Election, SDF, 2002, p.12).

The party also promised that it will give responsibility to the Panchayat's over ruling and maintaining all government institutions like-Primary Schools, Primary Health Centers, Public Libraries, Community Information Centre, grounds for sports, rural tourism and giving recommendation for the issuance of domicile and trade license (Election Manifesto, SDF, 1997, p.6, 2004, P.3). Following its promise, the Panchayat election was held on party lines for the first time in Sikkim in 1997. It held that in order to guide and help the Panchayat's public libraries will be opened in each gram Panchayat. It was promised that in villages, contracts will be given to the villagers up to Rs 10 lakhs, 5 lakhs work will be under the Gram Panchayats (SDF, Election Manifesto, Panchayat Election, 2004, p.12).

The party President, Pawan Chamling stated that the party had decided to hold elections on party lines because the main objective was to restore democracy. It wanted to restore the rights and privileges as well as the responsibility of the people to the people.

It further stated that the Panchayat election of 1997 based on party lines was a success. So following 1997 election, the Panchayat election of 2002 was also based on party lines. The party in its Panchayat election manifesto 2002 promised the following:

- All Government decisions will be made after due consultations with the panchayat's. This is done so to bring the voice of the people with the mainstream of thinking in the decision making for rural development.
- In every gram panchayat and ward the panchayat's will be empowered to decide on the plan as well as to implement and to maintain it.
- To enable the panchayat's to debate on the district plans and programme, the panchayat's at the Zilla level will participate in the District committees.
- The party strives to strengthen the panchayat's who look after the villages and village people, so 10 percent of the government budget is being devolved to the panchayat's and it will be raised to 30 percent in due course.
- The panchayat's shall have the power to identify and issue domicile certificate to the Sikkimese who do not possess Sikkim subject certificate but have receipt of dhuri khajana land revenue receipt, dada parcha etc.
- The party stated that the Gram panchayat's have the function of running and maintenance of all government institutions like the Primary schools, Primary Health centers, library, Community Information centers, rural tourism, minor irrigation works, community centers, grounds for sports etc.
- Restoration of democracy was the primary concern of the party. Therefore, the party states that the panchayat's will

play an important and active role in fighting the forces of exploitation, suppression and corruption.

- The panchayat's shall have the responsibility to educate and enlighten the people and make them aware of their rights and responsibilities.
- For the upliftment and empowerment of women, the party promised 33% seat reservation in Panchayat elections and 30% in job reservation to the women in Sikkim. The party shall abolish the social, political and economic discrimination of women.
- As a representative at the local level the panchayat's acts as a link between the administration and the people especially in the area of development. The panchayat's will be directly responsible to the people.
- The panchayat's shall facilitate the production and increase of productivity of vegetables, fruits, flowers and other cash crops by promoting marketing linkage. This will make people more self-reliant, self-sufficient and sustainable. The party further stated that this will also help the young people in starting their own business to make them self-employed and self-reliant.
- Agro-based industry will be started in villages; the panchayat's will play the role of bringing such new thinking into the villages.
- Panchayat's shall have an important role to play and be responsible for government initiated development policies and programs. The programs include huge opportunities to set up industries in their respective areas.
- Agriculture will be given the status of industry. The panchayat's ensures that villages will produce market and

distribute all kinds of agriculture produce in a scientific and profitable manner (Election manifesto, 2002, p. 1-16).

In the election manifesto 1994, the party pledged to give full facilities, privileges, responsibilities and power to the panchayat's and decentralization of power with the establishment of Panchayati Raj Institutions in all parts of Sikkim. In the 1999 Election Manifesto, the party talked about giving power to the panchayat's. The major difference between the 1994 promise and 1999 promise was that in 1999, the party also promised reservation of seats for women in panchayat's. The party also alleged that by giving more powers and responsibilities to the Panchayat's there has been decentralization of powers at the local level.

### **SOCIAL WELFARE PROMISES**

The Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) declared that Sikkim was a backward state. It dreams of making Sikkim and Sikkimese people self-sufficient and equally competitive with the other states of the Indian Union. The party gave importance to women's empowerment in the state. In this regard the party pledged to give them due place in society encouraging women power in democracy and protect rights, privileges and status in all fields of work. The party promised to grant 30% benefits in social, political and economic fields to women (Election manifesto, 1998, p.7 & 2004 p.70). The party appreciated and promoted women's participation. The party promised 33% of seats for women in panchayat's and 30% job reservation (SDF, Panchayat Election Manifesto, 2002, p.13).

The party feels that senior citizens should be respected and protected by the state. It had promised that provisions will be made for their better livelihood. Therefore, the party holds and

promised old age pensions of Rs 200 per month for the old people above the age of 65 yrs. It further promised that pension will be raised to Rs 400 per month to help and give medical treatment to the handicapped and orphans. The party also promised to open orphanage and old age homes (SDF, Election manifesto, 1998, p.9).

The following table shows the total number of beneficiaries under Old Age Pension Schemes, Disabled Persons Schemes during the year 1997 to 2004.

**Table 1**  
**OLD AGE PENSION (1997-2004)**

Sl. No	Year	No. of beneficiaries
1	1997-1998	3855
2	1998-1999	6835
3	1999-2000	6835
4	2000-2001	10104
5	2001-2002	10104
6	2002-2003	10104
7	2003-2004	13429

Source: Department of Social Welfare, Govt. of Sikkim, 2005

The party promised that it will establish and maintain the historical and cultural sites of Sikkim. In addition, the party promised to preserve the age old traditions, culture, history, language of the ethnic groups of Sikkim namely, Bhutia, Lepcha and Nepali for maintenance of communal harmony (SDF, Election manifesto, 1998, p.13 & 2002 p.19).

Sikkim is composed of different races or ethnic groups. These groups have different languages, cultural patterns and have become the central point of socio-economic and political problems in Sikkim. Thus, the party keeping in mind the cultural, social background of these groups and to retain their identity provisions to preserve the scripts and history of the languages like Rai, Tamang, Gurung, Sherpa, Manger, Newari promised to declare all these languages as state languages. The party also pledged to give educational and employment facilities to the Sikkimese Scheduled Castes (SDF Election manifesto, 1994, p. 20).

The party declared itself a pro-people party. It is the party of the poor people with this notion, the party promises social upliftment of the poor people and grant land, forest land to built house to the landless (SDF, Election manifesto, 1994, p.7). It also promised 50% job reservation for Sikkimese candidates in offices under central government in Sikkim. As peoples party, it promised 23% seat reservation for ST (Scheduled Tribes) and 6% for Scheduled Caste and 21% for Other Backward Classes. It promised to increase age limit from 30-35 for government jobs. Grant allowance to unemployed people, help the poorest family by helping with up to Rs 500 in case of birth, marriage and death. This shall be granted by recommendations made by the concerned ward panchayat's, gram panchayat's and Zilla panchayat's (SDF, Election Manifesto, 1994, p. 24). The party also alleged to grant 20,000 as grant in aid to property less, landless poor Sikkimese people. For the protection of forest and to prevent deforestation, the party provided L.P.G. gas cylinder to the people living below the poverty line (SDF Election Manifesto, 1999, pp.48-49). The Sikkim Democratic Front (SDF) promised to grant rice at cheaper rate to the poor families (SDF, Election Manifesto, 1994, p.8)

In the section on health, a high child mortality rate, low immunization rate for children and high death rate for rural women of child bearing age have been recorded in Sikkim (Sikkim, The Peoples Vision, p.17, 2001). This gives clear indication that family health needs attention. Due to poor rural health infrastructure, the patients are referred to big hospitals outside the state which costs high expenses for the poor people. The Sikkim Democratic Front, thus, promised to establish health centers and medical facilities making Sikkim diseases Free State by 2015. This is a new vision of Sikkim Democratic Front. The party promised to launch hepatitis 'B' vaccination programme free of cost to the children (SDF Election manifesto, 2004 p.53). The party holds that there shall be hospitals in all the four districts of Sikkim with maximum tools and modern scientific infrastructure for treatment of diseases. Further it lays down in the election manifesto that open health centers with doctors, medicine and ambulance would be provided in each village of Sikkim (SDF, Election manifesto, 1999, pp.33-34 & 2004 pp.53-54).

The party promised during the 2004 elections that along with the treatment of the disease, the disease will also be diagnosed for which the people do not have to go outside the state for treatment. The party also promised that it will give more attention towards the health of the old aged, children and women. To make people health conscious and aware, there shall be health exhibition cum conference every year.

The party stated that in the past five years, 10,000 youths were given employment and promised that in the next five years, employment will be given to 25,000 youths, covering each year, 1000 persons. The party strives to increase the age limit in government jobs from 30-35 years. The Scheduled Castes will be

given justice by reserving 6% seats in the panchayati raj institutions. It also promised relaxation in job, education for SC like Kami, Damai, Sarki and Majhi (SDF, Election manifesto, 1999, p.28).

It promised to set up State Women Commission for the development and protection of Rights of Women in Sikkim (SDF, Election Manifesto, 1999, p. 40). It also promised issue of ration cards to all the people of Sikkim. The ration card holders would get Rs 10 per kg rice at Rs 5 only. The state government would bear the remaining Rs. 5.

### **ECONOMIC PROMISES**

Following restoration of democracy in the state, the party aimed at development and re-orientation of the economy of the state. Sikkim Democratic Front claimed that during the earlier regime, the state's economy was in a miserable condition. The government borrowed loans from the centre and other financial institutions up to Rs 500 Crores. This money was not utilized for the development in the state instead loans were granted to the party supporters. The state revenue was only Rs 40 Crores when the SDF took over in 1994. Within a span of 6 years, the revenue situation improved to a total of Rs 125 Crores (Gaunley, 2002).

The party promised to make the Sikkimese people self-reliant by uplifting the economic conditions of the poor and it promised the development of the rural areas which will help in alleviation of poverty. The party also promised to set aside 70% of its annual budget for economic development (SDF, Election Manifesto, Assembly and Lok Sabha election, 3 Oct, 1999, p.11).<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Sikkim Democratic Front pledges to remove corruption from its roots. To it the SSP government and the Chief Minister Nar Bahadur Bhandari faced CBI charges in the late 80's and early 90's this led to mal-administration of the state. The

The party promised to solve the problems of the labourer's and low wage earning employees. The party promised that it would make an effort to regularize the employees who were working as muster roll for three years and increase their daily wage up to Rs 50/- (SDF, Election Manifesto, 1994, p. 16).

The party promised the constructions of roads to connect all the villages. It promised that it will provide Bus services in all parts of Sikkim. The party pledged to maintain an air service through helicopter and an air plane having capacity of 20 passengers in the state (SDF, Election Manifesto, 1998, p.6; 1999, p.30 & 2004, p.34).

The party talked about road infrastructure as roads and highways are not well maintained in the state. The topography and climate of the region makes it prone to landslides and erosion. Several roads have not been repaired for long periods. The main means of transport is only roads. It is the only life line of the population. Thus, the party promises to link every village by roads to the main town. There is absence of a rail network or commercial air services in Sikkim. The only depending factor is on single Highway- National Highway 31A (NH 31A).<sup>24</sup> Any major disruption to NH 31A, mainly when bandhs are called in Darjeeling, Kalimpong areas of West Bengal, cuts Sikkim's link with other parts of the country. The party therefore had demanded for an alternative highway for Sikkim (SDF, Election manifesto, 1998, p.6, 1999, p.29, 2004, p.34).

The Sikkim Democratic Front promised in its election manifesto the reopening of the Nathula trade route-Indo-China

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opposition political parties in Sikkim like the Congress I, Bharatiya Janata Party, Rising Sun, Communist party of India also demanded Presidential rule in Sikkim.  
<sup>24</sup> NH 31A the only linking line of Sikkim with the rest of the country.

trade route. The route would improve the relation with China and more it would increase market and export state products to the national and international market. This would benefit both the government as well as small scale industries in Sikkim (SDF, Election Manifesto, 1994, p.6, 1999, p.6, 2004, p.34).

Industrial development is very low in Sikkim. There can be a number of factors reasons for this under development, like physical remoteness, difficult terrain, lack of raw materials and markets, high transport and marketing costs. Apart from this, the Sikkim Democratic Front was of the view that the Bhandari government had failed to solve these problems faced by the industries. The industries in Sikkim are mainly small scale industries and cottage industries which if given care would contribute in the increase in state's revenue. Realizing this fact, the Sikkim Democratic Front also promised to arrest the sickness of the industries and revive them. It had reiterated that it would demand funds from the central government for its maintenance (SDF, Election Manifesto, 1998, p.8; 1999, pp. 31-32; 2004, pp.21-22).

## **PROMISES FOR THE AGRICULTURAL SECTOR**

Sikkim is an agricultural land. More than 75% of the people live in rural areas with only agriculture being the source of income. Agricultural production is very low in Sikkim due to many factors like-cultivation cost being very high because of outdated farming practices, high cost and inadequate supply of inputs like seeds, seedlings etc. There is a shortage of well trained, specialized staff on government farms to give information on good farming practices and modern techniques. The farmers depend on middle man for credit and making outlet due to poor marketing structure and lack of wholesale market (Sikkim People's Vision, 2001). Thus,

the necessity on the part of the government is to make arrangement for the establishment of agriculture based industries, providing high yielding variety seeds, modern technological approaches, scientific knowledge and education in Sikkim.

The SDF before coming to power in 1994 analyzed the agricultural condition in Sikkim and it promised to give more attention to the agricultural sector. For this it promised in its election manifesto of 1994 that 70% of the budget will be set for rural development which also means agriculture. The party promised that agriculture will be given the status of an industry. For this steps will be taken up by the Panchayat's to ensure that village produces market and distribute all kinds of agriculture produce in a scientific manner. The progressive farmers will be given necessary inputs (SDF, Election Manifesto, 2002, p.15).

For better agricultural production in the state, a study of Progressive cultivation of maize, ginger, cardamom, pears, tea leaves and herbal plants was promised by the party. Establishment of new industries, training programmes to the farmers for better agricultural knowledge were also promised. It also promised that the government would take the responsibility for the sale of cash crops like cardamom, ginger, and oranges. Cultivation of vegetables and flowers especially Sunakhari was encouraged<sup>25</sup> (SDF, Election Manifesto, 1999).

It promised that there will be a rural library in each gram panchayat to give information regarding farming and cultivation. 13% of the total land area of the state is for agricultural purpose, Sikkim lacks resources. So the party promised to use central aid for its development purpose (SDF, Lok Sabha Election manifesto, 1998, p.5). It further promised that in order to boost agricultural

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<sup>25</sup> Sunakhari is the local species of flower found only in Sikkim.

production, a separate budget over and above the prescribed allocation of state fund from the centre will be arranged by the party (SDF Election Manifesto, 1998).

The party in order to make Sikkim more developed in the agricultural field and to give it more importance made many promises in the Assembly Election of 1999 (p. 19-22).

- Each village shall have one industry on ginger, fruits, cardamom, bamboo etc.
- Tea garden in all the four districts of Sikkim shall be provided with information in the cultivation of tea and mini-infrastructures.
- To guide the farmers, the government (SDF) shall appoint an assistant in each gram panchayat and provide scientific techniques of cultivation of crops and vegetables.
- Floriculture will be encouraged and necessary arrangements will be made to sell products outside the state.
- Like in other states of the country, state Krici Bima Yojana with the help of the central government will be started in Sikkim.
- The party shall come up with new programmes in the field of providing better opportunities to the farmers.

In the election manifesto of 1999, the party stated that the government under its banner has contributed much in the development of agriculture in the state. It further stated that it will do more towards agriculture if it is voted to power. For this it promised in the Election Manifesto 2004, that:

- To increase productivity the progressive farmers will be given all necessary inputs.

- The government shall make arrangements to sell the agricultural products in the market at a profitable price.
- An exhibition will be held and shall grant award to the farmers who produce maximum and this will encourage and help the farmers to increase the productivity and increase healthy competition among them.
- The government shall encourage tea cultivation and mushroom cultivation in the state and provide with seeds, manure, information, training, tools etc.
- Shall make Sikkim purely an organic state. For this the state shall make arrangements for the provision of making natural manures for agricultural production.

The party further promised that a programme will be arranged for the farmers who intend to learn and know new agricultural techniques from other states. To it the government shall make provisions of soil conservation and soil erosion.

The government gave importance to tea, mushroom, orange, passion fruits, guava, banana, papaya, and apple cultivation and facilities will be provided for its cultivation. To help the farmers with facilities, Co-operative banks will be opened in the state to provide with loans. It will help the farmers and encourage them in poultry farming, Dairy farming, Piggery, Fishery etc.

## **PROMISES FOR THE EDUCATIONAL SECTOR**

Sikkim's Literacy rate as per the 2001 census was 69.68 percent, which was much above the national average of 62 percent. In Sikkim, educational system has improved with the increasing literacy rate and growing school enrolment but still the educational achievement is relatively low in Sikkim. This can be due to lack of

access to schooling and low level of school competition. There can be other factors too which are responsible for poor performance of education like-absence of transport to and from school, poor school infrastructure and largely untrained teachers etc.

The party promised to make a provision for starting its own state school board and University in Sikkim.<sup>26</sup> Sikkim also lacks technical and vocational institutions. It also promised to open up Polytechnic schools, Rojgar Mulak and business oriented education to make people self-reliant. The party also promised the establishment of Degree colleges in each district of Sikkim and a University of its own in Sikkim to bring all educational institutions in the state under its aegis (SDF, Election Manifesto, 1999, p.17-18; 1998, p. 5; 2004, 48-49).

To encourage education in the state, the party promised that government schools would not charge any tuition fee from the students and distribute free text books and exercise books. All students up to class V were to be provided free uniforms and mid-day meals (Election Manifesto, 1994, p.15; 1999, p.15-16). It also held that:

- The party also dreams of making Sikkim a fully literate state by 2015 (Election Manifesto, 2004, p.15)
- The party also promised to grant scholarships and quota reserved for Scheduled Tribe, Scheduled caste candidates opting higher studies outside the state. The scholarship will range from Rs 500-1000-1500 per student (Election manifesto, 1994, p.17).

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<sup>26</sup> Sikkim lacks state educational board of its own and a State University. For further studies the students have to get admission to the Universities outside Sikkim.

- The party promised a separate pay scale for school teachers in the state. It also held that medical leave with full salary would be provided. In case of retirement of teachers, the job would be given to his/her children (Election Manifesto, 1994, p.15).
- In order to help in the education of the orphans the party promised to set up a separate educational institution under the Govt. of Sikkim (Election Manifesto, 1994, p.19).
- In the election manifesto of the Assembly Election, 1999, the party stated that the government under the SDF granted free education which includes free tuition fees, provided text books and uniforms to the students up to class eight. The party further holds that the government shall take steps to make education free up to college level so that all the poor students can avail higher studies. The party also laid down that free school bag shall be given to the students up to class V in all government schools (SDF, Election Manifesto, General Assembly Election, 1999).
- In all the gram panchayat's, the party said that there shall be Madhyamik School.
- The party promised to include subjects like environmental studies and computer education as a compulsory subject at the lower level of education.
- It also promised to start vocational education in 40 senior secondary schools in the state.
- The party promised that after coming to power, it would increase the information centers from 40 to 60 within five years of its term (SDF, Election manifesto, 1994, p.17; SDF Election manifesto, 1999, p.17; SDF Election manifesto, 2004, pp.51-52).

Apart from the promises laid down by the party in the election manifestoes, the party President Pawan Chamling made certain declaration and promises to the people on various occasions in the state. After its major victory in the State Assembly election of 1994, the new Chief Minister stated that "first priority will be given to the restoration of democracy in the state". The government will concentrate more on the various needs of the people, particularly the poor and the downtrodden instead of building his own image and the image of the party. In an interview to free Press Journal (8<sup>th</sup> January, 1995) the party president Pawan Chamling stated that, in its task of restoring democracy in the state, the press will be given freedom and it will allow to re-establish newspapers destroyed by the earlier government. Teachers and government employees will be given association and Trade Union rights. The State Human Rights Commission will be formed and the labour Act will be implemented very soon.

In January 2003 he announced to distribute 3000 milch cattle's, 3000 piglets to the people living below poverty line as animal husbandry is one of the important sectors of rural economy. He also announced that a financial development Corporation will be set up for the economic development of the backward communities like Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes (OBCs). A new industrial policy was announced which would promote agricultural products and handlooms and handicrafts industries and tourism related industries. The new government enforced the new Sikkim Panchayat Act 1992 and Nagar Palika Act to ensure peoples' participation in democratic process so that democracy takes firm roots in the society.

On the occasion of the celebration of 48<sup>th</sup> Independence day on 15<sup>th</sup> August 1995 in Gangtok, Pawan Chamling talking about poverty Alleviation programmes announced new schemes. He announced that the government shall provide houses to 15,000 poor people in a phased manner over the next five years. He also announced that the government would provide a 2-point electricity connection free of cost to 30,000 houses over the next five years.

He announced to increase the number of beneficiaries under the old age pension scheme in order to lower the scale of poverty in the state. He announced to introduce maternity allowance at the rate of Rs 300 for the people and a scheme of providing Rs. 3000 to the poor families to enable them to perform the social and religious rites for the dead. He further announced that the government would take the major decision to develop the core sectors of economy by increasing agricultural production and industrial growth. Higher priority to education and health will be given. The apex cooperative bank would be set up to avail financial assistance for the farmers.

According to the newspaper reports of 'Sikkim Express' March 20-26, 1995, celebrating 100 days of SDF rule in Sikkim, the SDF government promised to uplift the downtrodden and alleviate the suffering of the weaker sections of the society by meeting the challengers with courage. Earlier the government focused on how to bring development in the state and now its focus was shifted to the

At the state level Panchayat meet held in June, 1995, at Namchi, South Sikkim, Pawan Chamling promised to fulfill every promises made by him. He expressed that Sikkim will be made free income tax state, all Nepalese would be included in the OBC list, Limboo, Gurung and Tamang would be declared as tribals,

restriction area permit would begin, helicopter service to be continued from September, 2005, which had stopped functioning and construction of Airstrip for small planes would be completed.

During the grand celebration of the Anniversary of the SDF government in December 12, 1995 in Gangtok, the party members put forward different suggestions. Political and economic resolutions were passed in the open session on December 12. All together 15 resolutions were passed. The party in its resolution resolved to:

- Include all Nepalese in the OBC category
- Declare Limboo, Tamang, Gurung and Manger as Tribal community in the state.
- The party strives for the inclusion of the languages of ethnic groups like Bhutia, Lepcha and Limboo in the Eighth Schedule of the constitution.
- The party resolved to give full security to the old laws in accordance with the Revenue Order No.1.
- It pledged to make Sikkim Income tax free state.
- It resolved to reserve seats for the Limboo, Bhutia and Lepcha and Nepalese in the State Legislative Assembly.
- The party resolved to declare Sikkim as the backward state as no significant development in the state was seen during the past 20 years.
- The party passed a resolution to make demands to the central government for developmental schemes like Airport facility, establishment of University in the state, financial aid for further growth of industries, power, transport, establishment of cultural center, language, developmental fund, and construction of alternative

highway to Siliguri and make Sikkim a transaction centre in relation to trade with Tibet.

- It pledged to make Sikkim a self-sufficient state by implementing schemes for the upliftment of poor people.
- It resolved to stop the spread of Communal feelings in the state.
- The party would strive for women self-respect and justice for women.
- The party would coordinate the people of different communities for the development of languages in the state.
- The party promised to build competitive attitude among the students and give more importance to education.
- The party resolved to proceed further in making the women and youths self-reliant and self-employed.
- It passed in the resolution that the party and the people of Sikkim will always support the centre to fight against corruption and terrorism in the state.

In August, 1997 at a Rally held at Temi bazar before the Panchayat election which was scheduled to be held on September, 1997, Pawan Chamling, the party President declared that his government has planned to spend one third of the state's total plan outlay of Rs 1600 Crores towards the development of the panchayat's. He stressed that every village would get a school, electricity for every houses and 'roti, 'kapda our Makan' for every citizen in the ninth five year plan. It also promised to provide job opportunities to 2000 people. It also promised that 1000 contractors were to get opportunities when the Teesta Hydel Project phase will be implemented.

On the occasion of the Foundation Day of the party at Gangtok in January, 1999, the party decided to grant an amount of Rs twenty thousand and distribute 30 GCI sheets to the people living below poverty line. A constituency level campaign committee was to be constituted to carry the political campaign for the next election. The meeting also resolved to constitute a disciplinary committee and Zonal committee in each and every market zone to speed up its political campaign.

Observing the Labour Day on May 1<sup>st</sup> 1999 the party President Pawan Chamling made commitments to uplift the proletariat sections of the society and to bring about a revolutionary change in their condition. A year before the next General Assembly Election, in a public meeting held at Pakyong, East Sikkim, Pawan Chamling, the Chief Minister of Sikkim declared financial assistance of Rs. 20,000/- each for families whose landed properties and houses have been damaged by natural calamities which was to be free and not to be repaid back (Sikkim Express, 7-13 November, 1998). To make the state self-sufficient the government under the SDF would utilize the hydel power and tourism potentials of the state. Every village would be marked to make it a tourist attraction.

On June 27, 2000, at the meeting at the conference hall of the Tashiling Secretariat, Gangtok, Pawan Chamling declared that a model village in each of the 30 constituencies will be created to improve the living condition of the rural poor. Pawan Chamling, the party President of Sikkim Democratic Front assured the people after winning the Assembly election for a second term in 1999, that, the government is committed to provide "good governance and accelerate the pace of development" to attain the Sikkim vision of 2015. He further added that he would work towards

making Sikkim a model state (Sikkim Express, 16-22 October, 1999).

Pawan Chamling dreams of transforming Sikkim into an ideal state where all round development including political, social and economic development is secured. Quality of life of the people will be improved. He further stated that every citizen in the state gets a roof over his head, three square meals a day and basic amenities like education, health and social justice. He also dreamt of making Sikkim the most eco-friendly state in the country (The Statesman, Wednesday, 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2001).

On the eve of the Third Millennium and the 21<sup>st</sup> century on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2000, Pawan Chamling delivered a speech in Gangtok where he declared that it is necessary to develop Sikkim's own potential to accelerate the development process and this would free Sikkim from economic slavery. To him Sikkim's natural resources should be explored and transform the natural beauty into eco-tourism.<sup>27</sup> For this, he declared that tourist spots be developed in each gram panchayat unit with the involvement of panchayat's and the people at large (Sikkim Express, 2, January, 2000).

To keep the pace with the fast moving 21<sup>st</sup> century world, the government decided to fully computerize the administrative system. He declared to make the state's administration more organized, smooth and effective through computerization. The farmers in Sikkim are following the old methods of farming.<sup>28</sup> There is an absence of allied industry to provide a centre for agricultural output. Thus, the rural farmers are compelled to sell out their agricultural product in raw form. The government

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<sup>27</sup> Sikkim is rich in natural resources; therefore, tourism can be developed as an industry for economic growth.

<sup>28</sup> Till date, Sikkim's main economy has been traditional agriculture.

promised to establish such industries to process the manufacture products and also negotiate the sale of such finished products at national and international markets. For strengthening the economic growth further, the government declared to enrich the quality production of various agricultural products and orchids, flowers which are unique in the country (Sikkim Express, 2, January, 2000).

Along with the utilization of natural resources, the government declared to promote education as an industry in itself. By establishing elaborate educational centers, Sikkim would be a place of immense educational interest, Pawan Chamling declared to make Sikkim an ideal state by freeing the state from serious epidemics like illiteracy, poverty, unemployment and environmental pollution. Pawan Chamling promised that by the end of the first decade of the new century, Sikkim will be a 100% literate state. The government will make Sikkim poverty free, pollution free and clear the state of the drug menace.

On the occasion of being honored as the greenest Chief Minister by the Centre for Science and Environment on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1999 at India Habitat Centre in New Delhi, Pawan Chamling delivered a speech that Sikkim is giving more emphasis on eco-tourism. Along with economic tourism, hydro power potential will be developed by bringing out comprehensive state environment policy and use the NGO movement as a valuable resource in the development of this sector. The state government would make proposal to introduce Himalayan Ecology in the awareness about the environment to promote eco-tourism in the state.

## **Shifts in the Nature of Promises**

Analyses of SDF promises reveal that it had changed over time. Shifts in the nature of the promises are noticed. The party promises were not the same in all the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. The party in its initial stages had promised to restore democracy, safeguard the rights of the Sikkimese people and gave importance to agricultural growth in the state. The same promises are absent in the later elections in the state as the party was able to fulfill its promises and hence came up with new promises to attract voter's.

The SDF has been ruling Sikkim since 1994. Till 2004, there have been 6 (six) elections which includes State Assembly elections, Parliamentary elections and Panchayat elections in the state. The party laid down many promises in its election manifestoes. We notice that there are some similarities and differences in its promises. Here in this part we will focus on the shifts in the promises. These can be divided into categories like, political, social, economic, education etc. Let us have a brief look at all this.

**POLITICAL:** In the political promises adopted by the party there are similarities as well as differences. Similarities can be found in the promises like restoration of constitutional rights of the Sikkimese Bhutia's and Lepcha's. This is mentioned (promised) in the election manifestoes of 1994 and also in 2005. The election manifestoes of 1994 and 1999 lays down that the party shall oppose the extension and enforcement of Central Direct Tax in Sikkim which the earlier government (SSP) had welcomed. The party had repeatedly emphasized this because it aims at making Sikkim a tax free state.

In 1984, the Bhandari government (SSP) deprived the rights of the people by refusing to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission which included some sections of communities like Rai, Gurung, Bhujel, Manger, Sunwar in the OBC category. Therefore, the Sikkim Democratic Front repeated its promises in 1994, 1998 and 1999, to protect the right of these sections of the society and include them in the OBC list. It had also consistently demanded the inclusion of Limboo and Tamang in the list of Scheduled Tribes.

However, in the election manifesto of 2004, we can see a shift in this strategy. In the Manifesto of 2004, the party did not talk about including Rai, Manger, Sunwar, Gurung and Bhujel in the OBC list and then include Limboo and Tamang in the ST list. We find this because it has promised to include Rai, Manger, Sunwar, Gurung, Bhujel, Thami and Jogi in the list of Scheduled Tribes.<sup>29</sup>

The demand for inclusion of Bhutia and Lepcha languages in the eighth schedule of the constitution is found in the two election manifestoes of 1994 and 1998. But the same promise was not laid down in the election Manifesto of 2004. This is so because, Bhutia and Lepcha languages, like Nepali is not a language spoken by the majority of the people in Sikkim and outside Sikkim. There are some difficulties in its implementation. Thus, in the later phase of its rule the party came up with new promises.

Nepalese and Tsong had their seats reserved in Sikkim Legislative Assembly till 1979. It was removed through Governor's Ordinance in 1979.<sup>30</sup> SDF, thus, feels that the Nepalese and Tsong seats should be retained in the State Legislative Assembly. The party therefore, strives to retain the reservation of seats for these

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<sup>29</sup> These groups/communities had already been included in the OBC list.

<sup>30</sup> The removal of these seats was not passed through the procedure in the Legislative Assembly as the government was dissolved.

communities and promised for the same reservation in the election manifesto of 1994 and 1999 General Assembly Election.

The party does not promise the reservation of seats for Nepalese and Tsong in the General Assembly election of 2004. This is so because the Tsong which belongs to Limboo community are included in the list of Scheduled Tribe in 2003. The party further promised to increase the reservation of ST seats for the inclusion of Limboo and Tamang in the Assembly. For the increase of representation in the parliament, the party once again promised to make the proposal in the union parliament in the party election manifesto to Lok Sabha election in the state of 1998 and 2004. The party in the beginning was busy and focused in restoring democracy and safeguarding the rights of the Sikkimese people.

Politically, looking we find similarities rather than differences. Similarities can be seen in the promise for the protection of old laws, Article 371(f), Revenue Order No. 1 (SDF, 1994; SDF, 1999 & SDF 2004), inclusion of Sikkim in the North East Council (SDF, 1999; SDF, 2004), Sons of Soil Policy (SDF, 1994 & SDF, 1999). The election manifesto of 1994 solely promised to restore democracy in the state, grant, social economic and political justice to the people. A shift can be seen in the political promises in 2004. It included that the party strives to include Chettri, Bahun, Newar, Sanyasi in the list of Other Backward Classes.

**SOCIAL:** Social welfare was the area where the party tried to give much emphasis. The party aim's to uplift the society and alleviate poverty and make the Sikkimese people self-reliant. It has promised to make Sikkim a poverty free state by 2015. Hence, almost in every election, the party had laid down different social welfare strategies. In the election manifestoes of the party to the

Assembly Election of 1994, 1999 and 2004 in the state, the party lays down different social welfare strategies like empowerment of women and upliftment of women in social, economic and political fields by giving 30% reservation of seats in government jobs, 33% seat reservation in the Panchayat elections and establishment of State Women Commission. This shows that the party wants more participation of women in all the fields of work.

In the assembly election manifesto's of 1994, 1999 and 2004, the party declared to set aside 70% of the budget for rural development. The party realizes the fact that Sikkim is a backward state as compared to other states of the Indian union; therefore, for the development of Sikkim it is necessary to develop rural areas. This is because more than 80% of the people in Sikkim live in the rural areas and it is important to grant benefits and facilities to the rural people to keep the base intact in the rural areas of the state since it gets majority support from the rural areas.

In the year 1994 and 1999, the party strived for social upliftment by reserving 50% seats in jobs for all Sikkimese, 23% for the STs, 6% for the SCs and 21% for OBCs. It increased the age limit from 30-35 so that maximum youths can get employment. In the election manifesto of 1999, the party laid down that to help the poor families during births and deaths in the family, the party promised to give Rs 500 to the family. It also pledged to preserve old traditions, culture, language and history of the three ethnic communities; Lepcha, Bhutia and Nepali in Sikkim. It also resolved to preserve the scripts and history of other communities like Rai, Tamang, Gurung, Manger, Newar and declare the languages of these communities as state languages. The same promises were absent in the next assembly election i.e. in 2004. The party has been able to form the governments with absolute majorities in the past ten years. The government under

the SDF succeeded in fulfilling its promises and aspirations of the people which we will see in the next chapters.

Health was also given priority by the party. For better health facilities the party repeatedly promised to establish hospitals in all the four district of the state. In 2004, the party came up with new health strategies. It lay down that by 2015, Sikkim will be a disease free state. For this, medical facilities like, hepatitis 'B' vaccination would be provided free of cost to all the children below 10 years. The hospitals will not only undergo treatment of diseases but will also diagnose the disease so that the poor people will not have to go outside the state for treatment. The hospitals will be provided with machinery infrastructures. All the villages shall have one health center with doctors, medicines and ambulances. The new strategies also include medical insurance for all the people in the state and decreasing the death rate of the Child from 38-30 per year.

In the earlier elections the party pledged to improve the living standard of the people by giving them social, economic and political justice and benefits. But in the election manifesto of 2004, a new type of promise was made that by 2015 all Sikkimese shall be lakhpati and by 2025 a Crorepati. It was a continuation of the promise that all the poor people will be self sufficient and self reliant which was promised earlier in 1994 and in 1999.

## **ECONOMY**

Right from the beginning, the party strived to make Sikkim and the Sikkimese people economically self-reliant. Re-orientation of the economy was its main concern. It wanted to alleviate poverty right from its roots. Therefore in all the election manifestoes, the party pledged to make Sikkim economically a developed state. We find similar pledges in the 1994, 1999 & 2004 election

manifestoes. The party promised to solve the problems of labourer's, low wage earning employees, regularize those working on Muster roll and increase the daily wage up to Rs 100. It further promised to reopen the closed industries to give employment to the people, scrap sick industries, demand funds from the central government, establish agriculture based industries, provide high yielding variety seeds to farmers, promise modern technologies, apparatus and scientific knowledge to the farmers.

In the year 1999, SDF came up with a promise of expanding the NH 31A for better connectivity and communication as it is the only national highway that connects Sikkim with the rest of the country. Each farmer was promised Rs 2000/- to maintain dung pit for natural manure dung. It promised to demand for central aid for the establishment of new industries, training for farmers, cultivation of ginger, cardamom, maize, tea leaves, herbal plants, fruits etc. Cultivation of ginger, cardamom, maize etc are given importance by the party because the climatic condition of Sikkim is suitable for the cultivation of these cash crops which can increase the income of the state by its production. A public library in each gram panchayat will be opened to enable the farmers to gather information regarding technical cultivation and farming, tea gardens in all four districts of Sikkim and provide the people with information in this regard and provide mini-infrastructure needed for tea cultivation.

## **EDUCATION**

In the overall development of the society, education plays a vital role. The party lays great emphasis on the education of the Sikkimese people. Knowing the fact that Sikkim lacks a School Board and a University of its own, it pledged to maintain and open its own school Board and a University in the election manifestoes

of 1994, 1999 and 2004. This is so because the party is giving its level best in fulfilling the promise each year. Free text books, exercise books, uniforms, mid-day meals, scholarships for the students opting higher studies outside the state, reservation of quota etc. are the common promises of the party.

However, a major shift can be seen in its promises in the election manifesto of 2004. The shift is not only in the educational line but in several other fields as well. In 2004 the party came up with a new vision - 'A New Vision of New Sikkim'.<sup>31</sup> Within a span of ten (10) years the Sikkim Democratic Party promised to strive in making Sikkim:

- ❖ A poverty free state by 2015
- ❖ Fully literate state by 2015
- ❖ Pollution free state by 2015
- ❖ Corruption free state by 2015
- ❖ Fully organic state by 2015
- ❖ To make Sikkim a tourist centre In South-East Asia
- ❖ To make Sikkim a culture based modern state
- ❖ To make it an unemployment free state
- ❖ To make it a producing state
- ❖ To make it a peaceful and protective state
- ❖ To raise the state revenue up to Rs 100 Crore
- ❖ To reduce Child death rate to 20%.
- ❖ To increase the per capita income up to 1 lakh.
- ❖ To see that all children between 5-10 years go to school.
- ❖ To reduce BPL percentage to 0%.
- ❖ To allocate 80% of the state budget for rural development.

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<sup>31</sup> The new vision of new Sikkim strives to make Sikkim, New and Happy Sikkim by 2015.

- ❖ To make Sikkim the eco-tourism capital of India by 2015.
- ❖ To provide sustainable livelihood to each household by 2015.
- ❖ To make it a major trade centre of Eastern India by 2015.

(Source: Election Manifesto-General Assembly and Lok Sabha Election, 2004, p.6).

The adoption of forest, environment and wildlife policy by the state government in 1999 marks a shift in government's policy focusing on the development process.<sup>32</sup> The party strives to promote tourism in the state; every village shall have one tourist spot because only 15% of land in Sikkim is agricultural land.

We see a major shift in the year 2004 because the Sikkim Democratic Front government realized that the conventional thought, process and concept of development would not be enough to solve the new problems and challenges of the contemporary world. In this regard, the government (SDF) initiated new idea to identify the problems and search their possible solutions. M.P. Lama of Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, was entrusted with the work of preparing the Sikkim Human Development Report and Ashok Lahiri the then Director of National Institute of Public Finance and Policy, New Delhi was asked to prepare Sikkim People's vision (Government of Sikkim, Thirty years of Statehood, Department of Information and Public Relations, 2005).

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<sup>32</sup> Sikkim perhaps is the first state to adopt such a policy relating to forest environment and wild life.

## **SECTION II**

### **ELECTORAL POPULISM**

In the first section of the chapter we dealt with the promises of the Sikkim Democratic Front that helped it to win consecutive elections in the state. The second section deals with the question of electoral populism of the SDF, which to us had been a part of the party's strategy. We look at how far the SDF had used populism in order to come to power and maintain power. We focus mainly on the electoral populism of the party. While we do that we will focus on the promises of the party during elections and elsewhere already analysed in the previous section. Before we come to the electoral populism of the SDF in Sikkim, it is important and necessary to arrive at the meaning of Populism and the conditions under which a populist party arise and succeed.

Populism is best defined as a political strategy. Political strategies are characterized by the power capability that types of rulers use to sustain themselves politically. Under populism a leader is an individual, a personalistic leader and not a group organization. Populism rests on the power capability of numbers and not special weight. Populism emerges when personalistic leaders are there to rule on massive yet mostly uninstitutionalised support from large number of people.<sup>33</sup> According to some populist cycles typically occur during periods of political and economic transition that shift or loosen the social moorings of the party systems. Populist leadership thrives when working and lower class groups are detached from existing parties and available for electoral mobilization by political new comers. This detachment

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<sup>33</sup> Populism remains a widely used but heavily contested concept in the field of comparative politics.

may be attributed to the emergence of new groups who have never been politically incorporated or bond between voters and established parties (Roberts, 2006, p.127).

The first such transition occurred with the demise of the oligarchic era and the rise of mass politics during the early stages of industrialization. The growth of urban working and middle classes forced traditional oligarchic parties to share the political stage with new mass-based competitors, as populist figures employed charismatic appeals to wield together multi-class conditions for reform.

The concept of populism is used in helping us understand how new identities are constituted. Ionescu and Gellner (1970) define populism as "any movement and political formation that is characterized by an ideological referent to the 'people'; as a homogeneous entity with exclusive positive and permanent values." More broadly, populism refers to social and political movements which seek to go beyond traditional ideological definitions by identifying with the essence of the people. Populism presents self as a transversal political philosophy defying traditional ideological dichotomies such as working class, bourgeoisie and left/right (Woods, 1995).

A diverse literature by (Dwayne Woods, 1995, p.187) on social movements has attempted to explain the sudden rise of new political and social forces. This literature has sought to explain the emergence of politically engaged groups such as anti-war, feminist, environmentalists and peace activists whose ideological focus and demands separated them from traditional social movements, which tend to concentrate on issues of economic distribution and redistribution.

Under populism an individual leader seeks to exercise government power based on support from large number of followers. Thus, elections, demonstrations and mostly recent opinion polls are the crucial instruments with which populist leaders mobilize and demonstrate their individual power capability. The popular leader gets support from largely organized masses to win office. Populist chief executives constantly invoke their broad mass support to boost their own influence and overpower their opponents.

In Latin America the scholars defined populism as a concept that encompassed several attributes from different domains. There was a close connection between populist politics and its social roots, socio-economic background conditions etc. In Latin America, authors like Vicente Palermo (1998) has observed that a charismatic individual wins and exercises power by maintaining direct, unmediated contact to a largely unorganized mass of followers. Many authors refers populism historically in certain developmental stages, such as the transition from tradition to modern society, the rise of mass society after the fall of oligarchic rule (Weyland, 2001).<sup>34</sup> Under populism the ruler is an individual, the connection between leader and followers is based mostly on direct quasi-personal contact, not on organizational intermediation (Weyland, 2001.p.1).

In populism mass support comes through formal institutional structures. The ruler should have an organized party. The follower's loyalty can vanish quickly if the leaders fail to fulfill popular expectations. Such a decline in popularity threatens the foundation of populist rule and can trigger its collapse. The

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<sup>34</sup> A political definition of populism is seen as a specific way of competing for and exercising political power. In populism mass support can have different levels of organization and institutionalization.

populist leaders for the mass support seek to create a particularly intense connection with their followers. The leaders represent and lead the people, rescue them from adversity and lead them to progress. Therefore, populist leaders constantly demonstrate their closeness to common people and stimulate popular identification with their leadership. They seek frequent face to face contacts with the masses, often through television, act in ways that embody and line out dreams of the common man, promise to include the line neglected populace in the mainstream of development and protect it from sinister forces. The relationship between the people and the leader remains as long as the party shows personal concern for the followers and a supernatural capacity for problem solving. Political success thus transforms populism into a different type of rule that rests on non-populist strategies (Weyland, 2001.p.11). Populist leadership rests on mass support of a collective, public character or consists of a dispersed set of private individuals. Populist leaders appeal to the people (Roberts, 2006).

In April 1992 National election in Italy, the ground shook and long standing political formation moved. Out of this political earthquake a new political formation arouses. The Lombard League, the main component of the Northern League won 8.6 percent of the popular vote making it the second largest party in Lombardy. In local elections of June 1993 in northern cities like Milan and Turin the Lombard League received more than 35% of the vote; making it the largest political force in these cities. Traditional political parties such as the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) disappeared from the political map altogether, even in Milan where the party had been the dominant political force for decades. In the social basis of the Lombard League, the League's initial basis of support is similar to the Piyhadust movement's in the 1950's; shopkeepers businessmen in small industry, artisans and

commercial agents. In cities as Milan, Bergamo it drew support from a cross-section of society (Woods, 1995).

In Western European countries like Germany, Sweden, Italy and Switzerland, populist parties like Radical Right Wing reject the establishment of socio-cultural and socio-political system. These parties do not emphasize on individual achievement, free market place and a drastic reduction of the role of the state. They mobilize the people and combine individual and economy with the socio-political agenda and appeal to the common people (Betz, 1993, p.43).

Studies of the social basis of support for various radical right-wing populist parties show that these parties attract voters across the social spectrum. However, in a number of cases political support is concentrated in particular social groups for example the Norwegian Progress Party. A brief survey of the social basis of the radical populist right shows that these parties, which have been most successful at the poll have forged an electoral alliance between segments of the working class and segments of the new middle class. The rise and success of radical right-wing populism in Western Europe is thus interpreted as the result of the increasing social and cultural fragmentation and differentiation of advanced western societies (Betz, 1993, pp.421-422).

Thaksin's Populism in Thailand can be cited as the most developed populism in contemporary Asia. Thaksin Shinowatra achieved massive personal popularity in general election of 2005 and 2006. No previous Thai elected political leader has achieved such popularity. This support was stronger in rural areas of the north, north-east and cultural regions and among rural migrants to the capital. During Thaksin's time in office the term populism was applied to Thai politics for the first time and rendered into Thai for

the first time to describe this novel cultivation of popular support and the mechanisms that lay behind it. In Thaksin's populism there was the projection of a relationship between political leaders and context. His populism was not mere opportunism but the response to social demand. He later broadened his political mission to include reforms that would modernize Thailand especially the bureaucracy and the political system. The slogan chosen for his party "The New, act New for every Thai"- reflected the image he projected as a Modernist and reformer. In the statement of his political ideas at this there is no social agenda except for one brief general commitment- "To bring happiness to the majority of the country." The single minded focus is on "enabling Thailand to keep up and be competitive with other countries" (Walaya, 1999, p.211).

Thaksin's speeches of this era do not make use of the term "the people" and do not imagine any social change other than the triumph of business over bureaucracy. For the 2001 elections, the initial party platform focused on measures to help small and medium business and the centre piece of the media campaign was a dramatization of Thaksin's own life in which he was cast as a poor boy who made good as a rich businessman. In December, 2000, he was leveled with corruption charges by the National Counter Corruption Commission. He was banned for participating in politics for five years.

For becoming a populist leader he first, manufactured a public presence significantly greater than that attempted by any previous Thai Prime Minister, primarily by using state-owned media which was under his control. He launched weekly radio show in which he talked to the nation for an hour about his activities and his thought on issues of the day. He dominated the daily television news and

also appeared in several special programmes. Secondly, his government implemented the three-point electoral program with extraordinary speed. For the health scheme, a workshop was held in February, a pilot scheme launched in April and the agrarian debt relief scheme was made available to 2.3 million debtors by the same month, while by September the scheme of villages funds was extended to most of the country's 75,000 villages and 5.3 million loans approved. He announced a new and leading feature of his political mission: "Nothing will stand in my way. I am determined to devote myself on politics in order to lead the Thai people out of poverty" (The Nation, 23 December, 2000).

He launched a series of tours covering every region of the country. He listened to reports on local problems and petitions for budget assistance. In many cases, he then gave instant approval for projects. Prior to election in February 2005, Thaksin made further tours mainly in rural areas of the North and North-East. Thaksin announced a much more elaborate programme of election promises than in 2001, including an extension of the village funds, land deeds for every landholder, a government pond dug for anyone prepared to pay a small fuel cost, four new cheap loan schemes, free distribution of cows, training schemes for the poor, cheaper school fees, special payments for children forced to drop out of school because of poverty, an educational gift bag for every new mother, care centers for the elderly, more sports facilities in urban areas, cheaper phone calls and an end to eviction from slums, more cheap housing, lower taxes, more investment in the universal health scheme, a nationwide scheme of irrigation and a deadline for the end of poverty- "Four years ahead, there will be no poor people" (The Nation, 18, 19, Oct. 2004; Bangkok Post 7 Nov 2004).

After the election of 2005, he toured less but made increasing use of a practice begun in 2001 of holding occasional "mobile cabinet meeting" in an upcountry location. These events created occasion for local people and officials to present petition to Thaksin. Thaksin's Government had launched three major schemes of social provision and promised many more. The distinctive characteristic of most of these schemes was that they were available to all. Previous governments had promised cheap or free health care for the poor by distributing cards. Villages benefited from Thaksin's populist programs. They felt empowered because they were responsible for putting him in power. Thaksin's populism was a response to the social demand with roots in the social structure molded by Thailand's strategy of outward-oriented economic development.

Leaders with many similarities to Thaksin have appeared in many other countries in recent years. In Turkey in 2004, for example a new Prime Minister, whose party's base of support comprised of small-scale producers and the informal sector, launched a party of populist schemes and stood aggressively against the country's political tradition going back to Ataturk in the 1920's. But Thaksin's populism is unique but follows in broad outline a pattern that was dominant in Latin America. The content of his populism began with a simple raft of redistribution policies which responded to the needs and aspirations of the informal mass that constituted around two-thirds of the work force and the electorate.

## **CAUSES FOR THE RISE OF POPULISM**

Now let us come to the question under what condition does populism arise in modern democracies? There are crucial permissive causes, the weak intermediary organizations especially

not established parties, where parties are highly institutionalized, they control recruitment and prevent outsiders from rising. Strong parties make their cadres climb a long ladder of positions before they reach national office. Newcomers can attract popular support without joining established organizations by appealing to voter's who lack loyalties to existing parties. The very weakness of parties leads to constant conflict within the party. Their frequent party switching makes they face the problem of building a stable populist party. Thus, party weakness allows populist outsiders to emerge. The only way populists can rise in countries with strong parties is by capturing an established populist organization. Since in populist parties, such as Argentina's Peronists Organizational Commitment is always mitigated by loyalty to personal leaders, populist aspirants find sufficient space inside these organizations and can use them to their personal will after reaching top position (Weyland, 1999).

Populist leaders emerge under only two conditions: if parties are not stable and established or if populist aspirants can take over an existing populist party. By contrast, where parties are strong, populist politicians remain marginal, thus party weakness or the presence of a populist party is a necessity. After taking office, populist leaders have a distinct relationship to parties. Besides weakening opposition parties they often refuse to join and strengthen the organization that helped them win power and support their government. The main reason is populist's desire to retain wide personal latitude.

Neo-liberal populists have indeed kept parties at bay, or if they emerged through an old populist party, subordinated them to

personal will and weakened their institutional strength.<sup>35</sup> In the eyes of neoliberal experts, lobbying organizations allow vested interests to hinder economic restructuring. Therefore, populist and neo-liberals coincide in keeping many sectors of business, labour and professionals at bay. These however reflect the market reforms. Populist leaders thus seek and find stronger mass support among unorganized sectors, such as Latin American white collar employees, shopkeepers and entrepreneurs. These segments which lack institutionalized participation in national politics see populist leaders as their main channels of access to government. Populist leaders who did not rise through old populist organizations, unorganized sectors are more likely to support contemporary populists.<sup>36</sup>

## **ELECTORAL POPULISM IN SIKKIM**

This part of the chapter deals with the electoral populism in Sikkim, especially the electoral populism of the SDF. Before studying the electoral populism of SDF it is also necessary to see whether Sikkim Sangram Parishad (SSP) under Nar Bahadur Bhandari used populism to mobilize the people and also it is necessary to see that on what conditions SDF emerged as a Populist Party?

Nar Bahadur Bhandari ruled Sikkim from 1979 to 1994. When the party was in power it followed certain policies through which it could get the support of the people. It promised to protect the rights and interest of the Sikkimese, maintain communal harmony,

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<sup>35</sup> Populist leaders resent the efforts of intermediary organizations to restrict their personal latitude through ceaseless demands and forceful pressure.

<sup>36</sup> In Argentina, Peru and Venezuela leaders' mass following came from poorer segments, especially the urban informal sector and the rural poor. Populist leaders mobilize these unorganized sectors and integrate them into politics (Weyland, 1999, p.386).

maintain national integrity and safeguard freedom and democracy in the state. The party (SSP) promised to uplift the standard of living of the people by implementing poverty alleviation programmes, improvement in Agriculture, education, Health care, Social Welfare schemes, Safe drinking water, rural electrification, and rural housing schemes (Sikkim Herald, 21, Jan 1984, vol-27, No-2)

To improve the educational system in the state it promised free education, upgrade existing schools and colleges, promised mid-day meals to the children up to class V and promised free education up to class XII, and free text books. In the health sector it promised to increase the number of hospitals, sub-centers, free medical aid and social welfare schemes like establishment of Old Age Homes for the Disabled and the Destitute institutions in the state (Sikkim Herald, Jan, 19<sup>th</sup> 1985, Vol-29, No.5). To make the lives of the common people more easy the party promised the construction of roads and bridges as to improve means of communication, build canals for irrigation. It promised the establishment of Veterinary and Animal husbandry centers, Panchayat Ghars, Public libraries, Multi-purpose cooperative societies and grant loans to the educated unemployed youths and farmers.

To generate employment avenues, the party promised the development of industries, small-scale industries, handlooms and handicrafts and other small industrial units. It also promised to give financial assistance to the needy people like artisans, entrepreneurs and businessmen as well as unemployed youths through Sikkim Industrial Development and Investment Cooperation, Financial and Sikkim Khadi and Village Industrial Road (Sikkim Herald, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1989, Vol.27, No.23). It promised

Pre-matric and post-matric scholarships to Scheduled Tribe and Scheduled Caste candidates, grant housing loans at a highly subsidized rate, provide home for homeless and impart training for capacity building and skill development (Sikkim Express, Jan 26<sup>th</sup> 1984).

The party (SSP) could mobilise the masses easily with such promises and policies as in Sikkim there existed no other group or political parties which could stand as a strong opposition to the SSP. Moreover, the political activities was dominated and controlled by only one political party, i.e. the SSP. The party was at an advantage and could win the Legislative Assembly election in 1985 with 55.04% of votes. Out of the 32 seats the party won 30 seats and also won the lone Lok Sabha seat. In the General Assembly election of 1989, the party (SSP) won the 32 seats in the Legislative Assembly.

However the promises and policies laid down by the party in the party manifesto was a repeated one like, the reservation of seats for the Sikkimese Nepalese, Son of the Soil policy, Constitutional recognition of the Nepali language etc, except the promise of granting Citizenship. The change in the attitude of Nar Bahadur Bhandari in his later phase of his rule in Sikkim made him unpopular amongst the people of Sikkim. His misgovernment, corruption charges against him and the formation of opposition groups in Sikkim led to his downfall and brought an end to his autocratic rule in Sikkim.

The Bhandari government failed to keep his pledges. It promised to establish real democracy in Sikkim and undertake all round development of the state. Development was brought by his government in the state but not to the extent that it satisfied the aspirations of the people. It promised to bring real democracy in

the state but in the later phase of its rule, the opposition parties like Indian National Congress charged the government with anti-democratic and anti-people activities in the state. The party also had pledged to remove corruption in the state but the Chief Minister himself was charged with corruption cases. The Bhandari government failed to live up to the expectation of the people. All this made Nar Bahadur Bhandari and his party unpopular among the people.

Pawan Chamling, a minister in the earlier government under SSP was expelled from the ministry as well as the party. He opposed the government/party in power in the Legislative Assembly for its misgovernment and anti-people political activities in the state. In the General Assembly election, 1994, SDF secured 19 seats out of a total 32 seats and formed government bringing to an end to a long established SSP rule in Sikkim. Chamling's success in this was because of his capability to convince and mobilize the rural masses, the unorganized sections of the society.

Like in Latin America, it is also noted in Sikkim that the leaders are charismatic individuals and exercise powers by maintaining direct contact with the large unorganized mass of followers. There is a connection between the leaders and followers. The leader for this mass support creates intense connection with the followers and be a guide and lead the people in progress. There is a connection with the followers and be a guide and lead the people in progress. There is face to face contact with the masses through different ways. In Sikkim the people can meet the Chief Minister personally and put their grievances directly. For this the Chief Minister has fixed a day in a week only to meet the public.

Like other populist leaders, Chamling also promised for the development of some sections of the people and give their rights. Chamlong promised that Limboo and Tamang were to be included in the Scheduled Tribe's list and Rai, Gurung, Manger, Bhujel, Sunwar in the OBC list which was neglected and denied by the earlier governments. Chamling promised to secure and grant the rights of these communities by including them in the Scheduled Tribe and OBC lists.

Chamling claims the party to be a pro-people party which stands for social upliftment of the poor people in the state. For the development and preservation of the identities of the ethnic groups like Lepcha, Bhutia, he promised to safeguard and develop the languages of these ethnic groups by making a proposal to include it in the Eighth Schedule of the constitution. Chamling granted land to build house to the landless Sikkimese people. The focus was also on women empowerment, environment and peace activities. In this context, Chamling received an award and was declared as the Greenest Chief Minister by the Centre for Science and Environment, New Delhi on 24<sup>th</sup> September 1999. Chamling gives importance to Women's Empowerment in the state. There is a separate Women's Wing in his party who are active supporters and party activists. Certain reservations are made in different fields for women.

In western countries, the populist leaders support base is mainly shopkeepers, businessmen in small industry, artisans and commercial agents. In Sikkim, Chamling's support base is mainly the agricultural rural masses. These unorganized groups are mobilised and integrated into politics.

The most important comparison of Chamling's populism can be made with Thaksin's populism in Thailand. Like Thaksin, Chamling

achieved massive personal popularity in the General Assembly Election in 2004. Out of 32 seats he secured 32 seats. His support was largest in the rural areas. The slogan chosen for his party was "Janta Ko Raj Ma Jantai Raja" (in popular regime, people are sovereign). This reflects his view of giving people power. Initially the party (SDF) focused on safeguarding democracy and guarantee the political, social and economic justice to the people. Chamling promised complete safeguard of Sikkimese rules, traditions and rule of law. Re-orientation of economy of the state was also one of his initial focus. Chamling announced to set aside 70% of annual budget for economic development in the 1999 assembly election.

Chamling made a commitment to make Sikkim a "New Sikkim and Happy Sikkim" by making it a self-sufficient and self-reliant state. Chamling travelled to all the four districts meeting people and listening to their grievances and understanding their problems. He toured more and held public meetings during the election period and became a more popular figure amongst the masses.

At the State Level Panchayat Meet which was held on June 1995, he announced to exempt Sikkim from income tax and make Sikkim income tax Free State, which the earlier government had failed to do. Prior to the Panchayat election of September 1997, Chamling declared a grant of Rs 1,600 Crore for development of Panchayats. He stressed that every village would get a school, electricity and "roti, kapda aur makaan" for every citizen. He promised job opportunities for 2000 people and 1000 contractors at Teesta Hydrel Project in Sikkim.

The party in its election manifesto of 1999 promised old age pension of Rs 200 per month for the old people above the age of 65 years and promised to increase the pension up to Rs 400 per month. He also promised to give financial assistance for medical

treatment to the handicapped and orphans. In the same year Chamling announced to give free tuition fee in all government schools, distribute free text books and exercise books. All students up to class V were to be provided free uniforms and mid-day meals. On the occasion of 48<sup>th</sup> Independence day, 15, August, 1995, at Gangtok, Chamling announced to issue ration card to all the people and give 10 rupees per kg rice at Rs 5 per kg to all the ration card holders. Chamling announced new schemes of providing houses to 15,000 people in a phased manner over next five years, providing 2-point electric connection free of cost to 30,000 houses over the next five years and increase the number of beneficiaries under the Old Age Pension scheme in order to lower the scale of poverty in the state. He announced that he will introduce maternity allowance at the rate of Rs 300 for the people. He introduced a scheme of providing Rs 5,000 to the poor families to enable them to perform the social and religious rites for the dead. He further announced to develop the core-sectors of economy by increasing agricultural production and increase industrial growth.

At a public meeting at Gangtok in January 1999, Chamling announced to grant Rs 20,000 to each poor family in the state. On the eve of Labour Day on May 1<sup>st</sup>, 1999, he made commitments to uplift the proletariat section of society for the revolutionary change. Chamling announced the establishment of a model village in all constituencies of Sikkim to improve the living condition of the rural poor. Thus in many respects SDF resemble the form of electoral populism of Thaksin's TRT party in Thailand. Like TRT, SDF held an annual Conference, Janta Mela and occasional regional meetings.

SDF came up with a new vision in 2004 Assembly Election of "New Vision of New Sikkim. In the Election Manifesto of 2004, General Assembly election, the party strived to make Sikkim new and happy Sikkim. Within a span of ten years, the party promised to make Sikkim a poverty Free State, fully literate, corruption Free State, fully organic state, unemployment free state, a producing state and a peaceful state in the country. It also promised to raise the state revenue up to Rs 100 Crore and increase the per capita income up to one lakh. It also pledged to reduce Below Poverty Line percent to 0% and use 80% of the state budget for the rural development. The party promised to make Sikkim the eco-tourism capital of India and major trade center of Eastern India by the year 2015.

Chamling had proved to be a populist leader. Prior to his coming to politics he was engaged in social activities and his works revealed his concern and interest in the rural society. The content of his populism began with his initial policies of restoring democracy and re-orientation of economy, which responded to the needs and aspirations of the unorganized masses mainly the rural agricultural masses which constitutes 75% of the total population of Sikkim. The people supported Chamling because he gave them the feeling of empowerment. Chamling appealed to the people by setting himself as an enemy of the "old politics" represented by the SSP. Chamling's populism like Thaksin's Thailand is not just a platform policy but matches the three points of Robert's definition namely mass mobilization, personalized leadership and a challenge to established life.